

An Island Called California, An Ecological Introduction to Its Natural Communities. By ELNA S. BAKKER. xvi + 357 pp., illustrated with black and white photographs, line drawings, and maps. University of California Press, Berkeley. 1971. \$10.00, buckram.

The subtitle proclaims that this book is an ecological introduction to the natural communities of California. It may well be an introduction, but it is not a very good one.

The bulk of the text deals with a poorly delimited transect across California at about the latitude of San Francisco. Appended to this is a discussion of desert communities and occasional references to other parts of California. It is usually difficult to know what geographical area the author has in mind. For example, chaparral occurs virtually throughout the length of California, but it is hard to find a statement of its extent.

Scattered throughout are discussions of some of the factors that influence and determine plant and animal distributions. But almost any recent high school or college biology text states these principles better and more succinctly.

In my opinion, the author views nature in a rather uncritical and exclusively humanly orientated way. Evidence for this interpretation is the liberal use of such phrases as: ". . . loveliest of the sea weeds," (p. 6); "One uninvited dike dweller is a dreadful thing. Called furze, or gorse," (p. 47); "Mice are juicy feasts for keen-eyed and sharp-eared predators." (p. 57); ". . . streamside jungles of interior California valleys . . ." (p. 61); "So hungry are some individual trees of these species for light . . ." (p. 99); "The other members of this coniferous royal court are no mean princelings." (p. 185); ". . . sagebrush is firmly in command." (p. 226); "What strange little trees they are." (p. 248); ". . . boojum trees (*Idria colmnaris*)—giant hairy asparagus stalks . . ." (p. 297). With respect to this last entry, it should be pointed out that: a more appropriate common name is cirio; cirio does not occur in the United States as a native plant; and that the most recent work on the Fouquieriaceae places *Idria* within *Fouquieria*.

Perhaps because of a lack of knowledge or objectivity, a number of errors and misrepresentations have crept into the text. Some are listed here. On page 2 it is insinuated that no one was interested in ecology before the twentieth century. On page 17 the food pyramid would lead one to believe that hawks eat only snakes and rodents only seeds. Where does *Ulex europaeus* grow on salt marsh dikes (see p. 47)? The interpretation of the maintenance of grassland boundaries is simplistic (pp. 75–76). On page 85 the number of stands of *Cupressus abramsiana* is stated incorrectly. On pages 137, 152, and 157 vernal pools are mentioned, but the author completely ignores the interesting morphological and physiological adaptations of vernal pool plants and fails to mention the interesting patterns of endemism represented by them. Vernal pool is not in the index! On page 211 the author would have us believe that the corolla of *Cassiope* is attached to the calyx.

The author does, quite correctly accept the presence of fire as an environmental factor, but gives the impression that somehow she wishes it were not so.

Considerable space is taken up with discussions of situations outside of California. These seem to add little, even for comparative purposes.

In short, this book is a chatty, not very well organized account of some of the plants and animals in California with an attempt to explain why these occur where they do. I doubt that it will be very successful as a text. The fact that this reviewer's name is incorrectly cited in the bibliography does not increase his enthusiasm for this book.—JOHN H. THOMAS, Department of Biological Sciences, Stanford University, Stanford, California 94305.